

Contributions.

THE VALUE OF EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY TO MODERN INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRESS.

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When existing things perish or cease to be, the only evidence of their having existed, is the seed fruit they have borne, the value of which, to the living of to-day, must be estimated by its quality rather than by its quantity.

The quality of early Christian history, must ever be determined by its semblance to the thing it attempts to describe or to narrate, and in this alone it becomes to every honest investigator, a factor of vast importance. 1st, Perhaps, in determining the nature of the awful conflict between the power of God as vested in the Gospel and its early preachers, and the various forms of voluptuous paganism as known and practiced by a contemporary people.

It is chiefly in the narratives of this conflict that we are given the overwhelming testimonies of early followers of the Nazarene, as to what they considered the genuine teachings of THE GOD-MAN and His chosen apostles. For certain it is, that these early zealous teachers of the Gospel of the Kingdom, would bring the genuine weapons of heaven to bear directly upon the enemies of mankind, perverters of truth, corrupters of morals, teachers of idolatry, and every disposition and distemper in man, that was in rebellion against God.

It is here then, that the Gospels and genuine Epistles find a strong external corroborative proof of their canonicity.

Little, perhaps, did Rome the powerful mistress of the world realize that the unpretentious teachers of the Gospel were planting seeds that would develop so soon, if at all, into a power that would actually effect, and ultimately doom herself to destruction.

We must in this particular phase of our subject keep in mind the facts, 1st, that the Gospel as taught in the life of our Saviour and his immediate followers, struck no blow at individual liberty of conscience or practice, but rested its argument solely upon the presentation of truth as it effects human liberty and freedom. 2nd, That

the early teachers of Christianity did not in any way try to lay hold of any of the powers of government, but applied themselves to persuading men to abandon *sin, wickedness, untruth, ful, idolatry, impurity* and to eradicate from their lives those forms of custom and religion which made merchandise of sex and turned the profits derived from these sources into treasuries from which was drawn support for the *Padros* whose lordly personalities reigned over the magnificent temples dedicated to the gods and goddesses of Grecian and Roman, Pantheons. "Sin, as transgressions of law" must of necessity imply all those acts of individuals, courts and governmental powers and customs, that effect individual rights, purity and worship.

This being true, and knowing that a nation's power and civilization may and is mostly determined by its religious faiths and practices, it will not be difficult for us to see in just what manner the Gospel threatened the pagan institutions, which were the only foundation of Rome's civil and economic structure. Rome's paganism was Rome's politics. The historical bent of Gibbon develops this idea very clearly in that author's work on the decline and fall of the Empire. Hence it will be readily seen that any doctrine that condemned paganism in its practices, though obnoxious as they were would quickly arouse an antagonism the extent of which would be as wide as Roman jurisdiction. That when early Christians, when tried for their faith, whether before the magistrates in Rome, or the Judicatory appointed at Alexandria, received the same sentence "i. e." death at the stake, it becomes painfully evident that the power behind the whole judicial system was the pagan priesthood, and the power in and behind the priesthood was his Satanic Majesty, the devil, which has always delighted in the sacrifice of human happiness, virtue and purity, and when he cannot accomplish his vile purpose otherwise is ready to furnish his dupes with a ready-made system of religion. Though beautiful in its gaudy temples and shrines it is in reality the slaughter house of moral purity and every power of the human soul that may support a germ out of which

a tree of happiness may grow, and bear fruit to its Maker.

John, the apostle, grand in his personal love, sublime in his faith, declares that for "this" purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John iii, 8. If then the Gospel had any part in the destruction of Roman Civic institutions, it becomes evident that those institutions were the work of the devil and consequently upon them was the Gospel power directed. If then religion is the foundation of government and that religion is from the devil, then it is certain that the work of the early Christians was weakening in effect the old foundation of the Empire of the Cæsars.

Just in proportion then as the Gospel light, revealed the rottenness of her civil structure, in just that proportion was the zeal of the people, one class to put out the light that revealed the danger, and the other class to abandon her crumbling ruins, and build upon a better foundation. Here then is the cause of the frantic persecutions of the early Christians, and at the same time the reason of its onward march and conversion of thousands upon thousands in the force of that persecution and in spite of it.

This brings us to those features of early Christian history which are especially important to us. Because we should know what mean the practices, as well as the teachings, of those early Christians that gave them such power and that won over to them, so many thousands of people, among whom were pupils of the most advanced philosophical schools of the Greeks, and voluptuous citizens of Rome. 1st, What did these people teach? 2nd, How did they teach? 3rd, What did they practice? How did they put their teachings into practice? For it must be evident to all that only the very practical and self evident could ever turn the world upside down, as these early Christians were accused of doing.

We will consider the teachings in our next.

[To be continued.]

Go to God with all your little cares and hopes, and sins, and sorrows, as freely and confidently as to your mother."